

A Shift of Perspective



**From a paper
by Roy Whitten
for the California
Institute of
Integral Studies**

Habitual thought patterns are very powerful, instantaneous and imposed with blinding speed. Something happens, and almost without thinking about it we 'know' what it means, what 'they' are up to, what we 'must' do to deal with it. We grow up with constant reinforcement for this way of being and we're so functional in it, we don't even know it's happening. We call it being 'normal.'

When an entire culture acts like this, the result is what we get to live with: unnoticed assumptions, conflict, misuse of resources, prejudices, justified cruelty, and other separating behavior no human being would choose if she or he were really awake and aware. This happens to you and me, over and over again, day after day. The problem is that knowing about it doesn't keep it from happening.

Three days ago, my daughter called to say that as she was leaving the school parking lot, her car was hit from behind by another student's car. My daughter is 16, a new driver, and was understandably shaken. When I discovered she had only managed to obtain this student's first name and phone number I was immediately and irrationally incensed. It was when she said, *'Don't lecture me, Dad,'* that I think I really lost it. I heard myself say things that are so comically stereotypical that, for a moment, I was outside myself, listening to some stranger being a complete idiot with his daughter. I was convinced of the following: that my daughter knew better, had been lazy, was being completely irresponsible, that the other student would deny what had happened, that her parents would disclaim all responsibility, and that I would be stuck with a bill for several hundred dollars.

I was completely uninterested in connecting with the truth of what had really happened. This was that my 16 year-old daughter was upset, and was calling me up specially to tell me about what had happened. That the other student had tried to argue her out of doing anything, but that she managed to get a name and a phone number as well. That my daughter knew the passenger in the other car, and had decided against starting a fight in a busy parking lot. For my part I was stuck in a separate universe of my own making, and enraged entirely by my own imagination.

Fortunately, the experience of being disabused of the power of our illusory world, as I was when I finally woke up from my nightmare, is also tangible and undeniable. We sometimes get glimpses of this kind of awakening when we least expect it. It sometimes corresponds with apparently insignificant events. But they come at critical moments in our personal lives, and also at key times in the life of the social and political communities of which we are part.

The word 'amazing' is not an exaggeration of the sense of peace, the fullness, the strength, the objectivity, the release from stress and worry, and the new sense of awareness that is instantly ours, when we know how to welcome it.